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SUBJECT: POSITIVE TREND: CONGOLESE REFUGEES IN
ZAMBIA RETURNING TO SOUTHEASTERN KATANGA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: PRM desk officer and poloff visited the Congolese refugee camps in northeast Zambia, escorted a return convoy of 511 refugees to Katanga, and visited refugee return and reintegration projects June 11-17. The government of Zambia (GRZ) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have increased their efforts to persuade Congolese refugees to return home. Depending on actual repatriation figures this year and in response to GRZ demands, UNHCR plans to consolidate Mwange and Kala refugee camps in October 2010. UNHCR and partners monitor the camps to ensure that basic standards of care and maintenance are met and have organized a system to move refugees from camp to home. A key concern for returning Congolese refugees is access to education and health services. The GRZ is increasing its efforts to persuade refugees to return to the DRC. The significant challenge in the next year will be how the GDRC and GRZ cooperate to repatriate the remaining refugees in the Zambian camps. End Summary.

¶2. (U) After June 10 Lusaka meetings with the World Food Program (WFP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Government of Zambia refugee agency, PRM desk officer and Kinshasa poloff visited refugee camps in northeast Zambia which currently host 24,600 Congolese refugees. Following the camp visits, PRM deskoff and poloff accompanied a convoy of 511 refugees June 12-13 to the Zambian port of Mpulungu and boarded the "S.S. Liemba" for the June 13-14 voyage to the Congolese port of Moba. PRM deskoff and poloff visited UNHCR and NGO refugee reintegration projects in Moba June 15-17 and monitored the situation of recent returnees and receiving communities.

¶3. (SBU) Most of the refugees fled armed conflict in the DRC in 2000 and 2001. Amid spontaneous returns, UNHCR began a facilitated repatriation program in May 2007 in partnership with IOM. In the first year, UNHCR facilitated the return of 7,900 refugees to the DRC; in 2008, 9,700 refugees; for 2009, the UNHCR plans to repatriate 18,500 Congolese refugees to the DRC. However, planning figures are based on refugee intention surveys and actual registrations for return consistently fall short. The 2009 repatriation began on May 9 and 3,359 people had returned in six convoys as of June. It is unclear if actual returns will reach planning figures, but enhanced UNHCR, Government of Zambia and donor efforts to "persuade" refugees to return appear to be resulting in increased repatriation.

Persuasion

¶4. (SBU) In 2009 UNHCR and NGO partners have stepped up repatriation efforts. According to UNHCR, there are periodic cross-border planning meetings during which all technical staff come together to negotiate details of the return operation. They have facilitated both "go and see" and "come and tell" visits by which refugees and recent returnees exchange information about conditions in areas of return. DRC officials have also participated in "come and tell" visits to encourage their compatriots to return. As further enticement, UNHCR has added a bicycle and an allotment of

corrugated sheet metal to the return package. UNHCR and the Government of Zambia have also added messaging that the facilitated repatriation program will remain open for a limited time.

15. (SBU) The discussion has shifted recently from refugees protesting return to questions regarding specific details of the process and the availability of services. The refugees are in regular communication with returnees and have concerns based on the stories they are hearing. According to Kala camp refugees who met with PRM Desk Officer and poloff June 12, their main concerns are:

-- security of belongings en route as they have had news of previous theft and breakage

-- availability of anti-retroviral drugs (ARV's) and other essential medicines upon return

-- repatriation package is not all available at one time

-- food ration is only three months

-- only families of three or more receive bicycles and roofing

(Note: UNHCR on both sides of the border is trying to address refugee concerns. However, the level of social services in the camps far exceeds that in areas of return and refugees in the camps may enjoy a relatively higher quality of life. End note.)

Camp Consolidation

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16. (SBU) Depending on actual repatriation figures in 2009 and in accordance with GRZ demands, UNHCR plans to consolidate Mwange and Kala refugee camps in October 2010. The GRZ is planning to turn Mwange into a youth programs facility. The GRZ has shown little interest in supporting formal local integration of residual DRC refugees. (Note: Jacob Mphepo, the Zambian Commissioner for Refugees, explained GRZ's intentions during a June 10 meeting with PRM Desk Officer, poloff, and UNHCR. The GRZ position on residual refugees is consistent with its resistance to integrating residual Angolan refugee populations in the west. End note.)

Camp Care and Maintenance

17. (SBU) While repatriation is the priority, UNHCR and partners ensure that basic camp care and maintenance standards are met. Kala is a model camp in its well-organized design and the ongoing provision of basic services. (Note: CDC recently gave the health services in Kala camp an A+ -- AHA is the implementing partner. End note.) The well-run health center displays organized record keeping and a demonstrated knowledge of public health, routine medical care, and emergency procedures. The health center staff disseminates critical preventative care messages and ensures early reporting of medical conditions through a network of community health agents.

18. (U) In addition to health care, there is an adequate supply of clean water in the camp as well as primary education and community service activities. Refugees have access to 18 liters of water per person per day. Lines at tap stands are not long and usage monitoring systems are in place. The water is tested regularly with most cases of water-borne disease traced to storage practices. Refugees are engaged in community service activities, organized by World Vision, as well as small entrepreneurial endeavors.

19. (SBU) The visit to Mwange camp revealed some problems with the health services, which received a C+ rating from CDC. While the first line staff was at a training seminar with a UNHCR doctor, there was no functioning medical backup system in place. A refugee health worker had just treated diarrhea in a small baby with malaria medicine without administering a rapid diagnostic test. (Note: Poloff asked that the child be tested when the lab technician appeared; the test was negative for malaria. End note.) The staff was unable to explain the health care system and appeared much less

engaged than counterparts in Kala. UNHCR has reportedly switched health partners in recent months with the hope of improvement but it is not evident to date. According to UNHCR, staff exchanges between the Kala and Mwange camps are planned.

¶10. (U) In both camps it was common to see one to three small solar panels in the yard or perched on thatched roofs. Refugees reported buying the panels in Lusaka for \$30 per panel. The panels are used to charge cell phones, play radios, and light small households. Some users reportedly generate income by providing charging services for a fee and others run small "movie theatres." The panels appear to be affordable, durable, and effective. Also notable in the camps is the widespread use of fuel efficient adobe-like stove technology (a wood-saving alternative to the usual three-rock fire).

¶11. (SBU) The WFP has been operating at 75% of the full ration since January 2009 (about 1600 calories per day). WFP and camp health providers are concerned that malnutrition rates will soon rise. Without contributions WFP expects a further cut in July. WFP also argued that funding in the next one-two months would enable it to take advantage of the currently low price of maize on the local market.

Repatriation Process

¶12. (SBU) The repatriation process appears to run efficiently. This is partly due to the UNHCR-led, weekly team meetings during which all partners assess the most recent convoy and plan the next one. When possible, refugees prefer to return via ship because it allegedly cuts down on transport time over difficult roads and the baggage allowance is slightly higher.

¶13. (U) UNHCR, IOM and partners have an organized system to bring refugees from camp to home. Refugees first gathered at the departure center in the camp for out processing and baggage check. Each carried a small amount of fragile and essential items with them while stocks of grain, household items, bicycles, and doors and windows (limited to 70kg per person) were loaded onto large trucks. Refugees were provided a warm meal at night and high energy biscuits. There were two rest stops en route from the camp to port. The facilities were maintained by the local community. Practices

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to ensure safety and dignity were respected: for example, women are not allowed to travel past 32 weeks of pregnancy.

¶14. (U) On the vessel Liemba, there was enough room for 500 passengers to sit comfortably. (Note: PRM Desk Officer and poloff noted that increasing refugee numbers on the ship to 600 may create overcrowding. End note.) Ship staff prepared dinner and breakfast for all on board. There were toilet and bathing facilities. Also, there were a sufficient number of life vests, floatation boards and two emergency boats. However, safety instructions were cursory and procedures complicated.

¶15. Following a welcome reception by local authorities upon arrival in Moba, the returnees disembarked quickly to board trucks from the port to the transit center. At the transit center returnees went through an orderly in-screening process, received a meal, and were allocated a place in a large tent. Those from the immediate area returned home that day. However, most returnees in the convoy faced a one to two day follow-on road journey before reaching their final destination, ironically close to the Zambian border. It appeared that the length of repatriation journeys to Moba could be reduced to two-three days if an overland route were taken. UNHCR shared our concern and told us that it is planning to explore overland possibilities. UNHCR informed us that a key bridge is out - a fix that could be a cost-saving alternative to the current routing, reducing the number of days in a return convoy.

Return and Reintegration Activities

¶16. (SBU) Access to adequate health services is a key concern for returning refugees. In a June 16 visit to Moba Hospital, PRM desk

officer and poloff noted that hospital services were poor despite recent Taft Fund rehabilitation. Indicative of local government-provided social services, hospital employees do not receive salaries. The head nurse explained that at the end of each month staff collected all "receipts" and divided up the profits as their salaries. Considering the size of Moba territory, the hospital was quite empty. UNHCR pays returnee health bills for six months. In another example of the dysfunctional health care system, three new ambulances, granted by Katanga provincial authorities, were parked idle in front of the Moba hospital. The territorial administration has not provided any fuel. The hospital receives patients from hundreds of kilometers away, sometimes arriving on the back of a bicycle.

¶17. (SBU) HIV/AIDS patients have access to ARV's at six different health centers/hospitals in Tanganyika District. However, the long distances patients must travel and poor health service provision leaves sustainable, long term ARV access in doubt.

Education access

¶18. (U) Access to primary education is also an important concern for returnees. UNHCR covers returnees' school fees for the first six months, after which the families become responsible. UNHCR and partners are building decent school structures throughout the territory, but costs are prohibitively expensive and the quality questionable.

¶19. (SBU) A Moba teacher explained that about half of a starting class has usually dropped out by the end of the school year due to the inability to pay the \$2 per month school fees. School fees, however, are the only way teachers get paid as the provincial Ministry of Education is not paying salaries. In addition, in some cases students are obliged to tend the principal's and teachers' fields. (Note: This may constitute forced child labor. End note.)

¶20. (U) WFP appears locked into the three month food ration for returnees due to competing regional needs and global shortfalls. Nevertheless, the refugees fare quite well and the disparity with the receiving community is evident. Community-based efforts to address return are a priority to mitigate potential conflict resident-returnee.

¶21. (SBU) UNHCR works with six NGO partners in the sectors of protection (ASADHO), health (AHA), logistics (GTZ), education (ADRA), livelihoods-creation (ACTED), and communication (Search for Common Ground). PRM partner projects in Katanga include livelihoods promotion (Catholic Relief Services and Food for the Hungry), mental health (Center for Victims of Torture), and communication (Search for Common Ground). PRM Desk Officer and poloff visited different project sites in Moba territory June 15-17. Most activities are running on schedule, although there have been some delays. It

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appears critical that sufficient management training and distribution of program materials take place earlier in the project period than is the current practice. As it is, actual income generating activities are starting late in the project cycle allowing little time to monitor impact and modify processes accordingly.

¶22. (U) Of special note, CRS's non-food item (NFI) fairs using vouchers appear to have the most concrete impact on the beneficiaries and receiving communities. Beneficiaries get what they need and the local economy profits from the direct injection of cash. CRS's seed and tool fairs have a similar economic impact on local growers who are able to sell surplus seeds for profit.

¶22. (SBU) Coordination meetings take place regularly among UNHCR and non-UNHCR partners. Relations between NGO's and UNHCR are reportedly good with NGO's grateful for UNHCR support with logistics on occasion. Relations with territorial authorities are also reportedly good though it appears NGO's mainly appreciate their lack of obstruction rather than any sort of productive cooperation.

Although most of the programs UNHCR and PRM support are accomplishing their short-term objectives, in almost all cases the lasting impact is questionable as the GDRC and development partners are doing little to ensure the long-term provision of infrastructure and social services in the region.

¶23. (SBU) Comment: The visit confirmed many of the Congolese refugees' reservations about repatriation as valid. More needs to be done to assuage the refugees in the camps that UNHCR is indeed addressing their concerns. It is evident that the refugees' welcome in Zambia is wearing out as the GRZ becomes more vocal in their persuasion for refugee return. However, it is encouraging to see that the GDRC and GRZ are communicating well and have active participation in the repatriation process via their representatives in their respective national refugee agencies. The significant challenge next year will be how the GDRC and GRZ cooperate to repatriate the remaining refugees in the Zambian camps. End Comment.

¶24. (SBU) Embassy Lusaka has/has cleared this cable.

BROCK